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ABSTRACT

Community development is defined as an interdisciplinary social sciences profession with the major functions being the land-grant triumvirate of teaching, research, and extension. The type of curriculum and other training needed for producing community development professionals is outlined. Also, the type of interdisciplinary management system required for coordinating the research, teaching, and extension functions is explored. The creation of an interdisciplinary structure, in the form of a center or institute, to support interdisciplinary programs is suggested. The major objectives of the proposed interdisciplinary center or institute for community development include providing: (1) a unit for coordinating, planning, and programming community development extension, research, and teaching programs; (2) sufficient resources of personnel and programs to attract outside funding; (3) a unit for planning long-range policy, staffing patterns, etc.; (4) a unit which can provide a coherent and coordinated liaison with the other states and with the Regional Centers for Rural Development; (5) a unit for developing cooperative and coordinated programming with Federal, state, regional, and local agencies; and (6) a unit for planning and sponsoring training for graduate students, extension agents, and other agency personnel working in community development research and extension. (Author/PS)

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THE ROLE OF

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

IN

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

by
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Abstract:

Community development is defined as an interdisciplinary social sciences profession with the major functions being the land-grant triumvirate of teaching, research, and extension. The type of curriculum and other training needed for producing community development professionals is outlined. Finally the type of interdisciplinary management system for coordinating the research, teaching, and extension functions is briefly explored.

*Given as a paper in the Rural Sociology Section of The Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, Atlanta, Georgia, February 4-7, 1973.

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Introduction:

Although community development is not synonymous with the concept of rural development, community development is the major focus essential to the development of rural areas and therefore should be considered the central and major focus in rural development. Rural development, as defined by USDA for research funding, is broader than community development as defined below but their definition agrees that the major priority areas of work are those which change the social cultural context to create employment, improve community services and facilities delivery to rural areas, improve family and other group relationships, and generally improve the quality of life in rural areas.

The position that community development is the major focus needed in rural development is supported by the fact that most of the major problems in rural America are rooted in systemic maladjustments in the social structure, processes, and institutions of American society. A mere cataloging of a few of the major problem areas will suffice to illustrate the point: 1) the lack of employment opportunities reflected in high unemployment and underemployment rates and low incomes illustrates the need for systemic and cultural changes in the economic sector to correct the problems, 2) the high incidence of substandard housing (reaching as high as 50% in some rural areas) illustrates that the institutional systems for housing are not able to do the job, 3) the low levels of educational achievement as well as the disadvantaged educational facilities and services are now recognized as

being rooted in other community and family maladjustments as much as in the school systems themselves, and 4) the inability to deliver health services that are quantitatively or qualitatively adequate at a price which most families can pay illustrates the need to question the structural and goal-setting procedures of the existing health system.

These are but a few of the rural problems that illustrate the need for systemic and cultural change, which require community development as the central focus for any rural development program with even a minimal chance of success.

Most persons attempting to define community development have erred by giving it narrower definitions and specialization than the totality with which it must be involved. Until Americans stop oversimplifying the nature of their problems and applying band aids to problems needing cultural surgery, we cannot hope to solve our major social, economic and cultural crises.

Multi and Interdisciplinary Nature of Community Development

The social sciences are the primary disciplines involved in community development and within the social sciences the major focus is placed on sociology, social psychology, economics, and political science. Of these, sociology has traditionally taken the lead in the functions of teaching, research, and extension for community analysis and development. The teaching, research, and extension work of early rural sociologists, and of those today, has focused on sociology, but rural sociologists have always taught and researched phenomena of all social sciences according to the nature of the problem which they are attacking.

The physical and biological sciences and professional fields such as education, philosophy, medicine and the humanities, are all secondary disciplines or professions in the field of community development. These secondary disciplines should be brought into the process of development as needed and usually perform a technical or expert role when the problem being analyzed involves their particular expertise.

The Multi Function Nature of Community Development

As with most program areas in the land-grant colleges there are three major functions in community development; these are teaching, research, and extension.

The role of teaching in rural community development is to give a fundamental understanding of American society and particularly the rural sector of American society.

Community development teaching should familiarize all students with the cultural institutions which the organizational structures are charged with operating for the benefit of the total community and society. Each institution, such as the institution of marriage within the family organization and the two party political institution within government, prescribes values, goals and normative behavior patterns, such as monogamy and registration for voting in primaries.

The function of research in community development is to refine and extend the knowledge about the functioning of community and other social systems as organizational and cultural systems in society. Most sociologists

traditionally distinguish between two types of research: basic and applied. Some sciences consider the two as incompatible and not complementary. In the case of rural sociology, and particularly community development, the two types of research are more apt to be classified as complementary rather than conflicting because the problems attacked require an applied orientation be taken; however, the interest and orientation of many scientists is toward the theoretical and basic social science problem that lies behind the applied problem. Indeed, one of the dangers in the applied orientation of land-grant research is that the researchers are often not required to be theoretically oriented to basic problems; consequently, they may research a symptom rather than a real problem. It therefore can be argued that land-grant research should always have both a basic and an applied orientation. Basic research is required to define how social systems and cultural institutions actually function in order that applied research may be done to determine corrective measures and changes. Often basic and applied research can both be done in the same research project. In some cases the only way the basic research can be accomplished may be within the context of applied research. For example, funding may not be available for the basic but would be for the applied research and, in addition, obtaining data for the basic might be difficult, were it not in the context of working on an applied problem. Thus the role of basic research in community development is to define both the nature of the problem and the social cultural context in which the problem exists. Applied research then suggests and tests alternative hypotheses for solutions to those problems.

The role of extension in community development is to utilize scientific and professional knowledge to help the social systems and communities make the social and cultural changes necessary for solving problems such as poverty and community services delivery. Basic to a good extension community development program is an effective public affairs education program. Public affairs education must usually take place in the context of working with the clientele in an attempt to solve the problems as they see them. In the process of working with them it may be necessary to help them redefine the nature of the problem and of the social context in which it exists. Once the problem is adequately defined and understood there is the additional task of helping the leadership and public to appropriately organize to bring about the social change required to reach the goals and objectives that they have in mind. This kind of programming requires the best of guidance in the social action, program planning, and implementation processes. The professional expertise required necessitates that community development be a self-contained program area receiving the same degree of merit and support as agriculture, home economics, and 4-H in the traditional land-grant teaching, research, and extension system. Furthermore, the program area of community development must be administered and led in policy and program by persons trained for community development. Until this is recognized and implemented, the field of community development will be hampered and relatively ineffective compared to what it must be to do the job.

Training for Community Development

The training for community development should be in an interdisciplinary, social science curriculum and multi-function program for teaching, research, and extension.

The community development professional must be educated and trained as an interdisciplinary social scientist with a fundamental knowledge in relevant areas of sociology, economics, political science, anthropology, and social psychology. In addition to qualifying as a good interdisciplinary social scientist with an adequate understanding of the total society and culture, each community development professional needs several types of specialty knowledge. One area of specialty is that of formal organizations. This expertise is critical since all communities are made up of and structured by the interaction network of its formal organizations and agencies which typically systemically extend to the state and federal levels. Fundamental to an adequate understanding of formal organizations is an understanding of the general functions performed by each such organization. Several of these functions are organizational maintenance, systemic linkage, institutionalization, social control, social change, socialization, institution maintenance, and differentiatiation or specialization. Another area of expertise essential for the professional community development worker is expertise in leadership development in formal organizations. Since courses and training in such leadership are rarely provided as a part of the regular university curriculum, in most cases it will be necessary to see that

adequate training and courses are added on existing programs. In such courses the understanding and skills necessary for carrying out the leadership functions in any organization should be taught.[1] Other specialty courses would include courses in state and local government, comparative government systems, community analysis, demography and population analysis and family. Also recommended are interdisciplinary community development seminars, and seminars on the organizational, procedural, and philosophical principles for community development.

Skills needed for research would be those gained through participation in existing research projects and through courses in research methodology, computer technology and statistics courses in addition to fundamental social science courses.

Extension community development professionals should possess skill and knowledge in working within small groups and formal organizations and on a more general level an understanding of the motivation and functioning of people in diverse social groupings. They need the skills and ability to make objective group, organizational, and community analyses while involved in the action. Other essentials for community development extension specialists are the roles of public affairs educator and specialist in program and community planning.

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[1]See for example, David G. Bowers and Stanley E. Seashore "Predicting Organizational Effectiveness with a Four-Factor Theory of Leadership," Administrative Science Quarterly, Sept., 1966; and Christine S. Tennant and James W. Longest, Professional and Paraprofessional Role Differentiation, Maryland Experiment Station, M.P. 821, College Park, Maryland, January, 1973.

The Management System for Community Development

A management system for community development should provide an interdisciplinary coordinating and programming unit for research, teaching, and extension programs in community development. Personnel involved in this management system would not be pulled out of the discipline departments but, rather, would have an appointment in a discipline department and also be a member of the management system unit for community development. Departments which function for the advancement and development of each of the disciplines are essential to the development of specialized knowledge. On the other hand, such departments are inadequate for integrating the knowledge of those disciplines into an interdisciplinary and multi-function teaching, extension, and research program for community development. A separate but interrelated structural unit must be established for management of the community development program and preparation of persons for doing community development work. The structure for the development of each discipline is vertically-oriented to a specialty while the community development structure is horizontally-oriented across disciplines and must have the particular structuring components that are appropriate to the interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary nature of its subject and methodology.

An interdisciplinary organization is needed to facilitate and reward the interdisciplinary team for goal oriented interaction, communications, and work facilitation and coordination in an atomosphere of mutual support and interests. The existing traditionally discipline-structured organization

focuses upon rewarding contributions and interaction that are specialty-development oriented and therefore discourages behavior that is oriented toward interdisciplinary products. Discipline orientation also encourages cooperation within the discipline while promoting competition and even conflict between disciplines. The interdisciplinary structure must foster cooperation between and competition within disciplines, recognizing which members of each discipline can contribute most to reaching the inter-disciplinary program goals. Generally the interdisciplinary units must focus on cooperative interaction; all competition should be focused on quantity and quality of product that contributes to goal achievement regard-less of discipline contributions.

Community development programs also require coordination of research, extension, and teaching programs of an interdisciplinary nature. The existing discipline-orientedorganization is preoccupied, and rightly so, with the coordination of those three functions within each of their disciplines and typically have little time, inclination, patience, or incentive for inter-disciplinary activities. The interdisciplinary structure would have to focus upon the task of coordinating those functions in the "rough and ready" interdisciplinary environment as opposed to the same task in the relatively "cozy womb" of the discipline environment. Therefore, a special inter-disciplinary structure must be established if interdisciplinary programs are to receive other than token support and attention. Such an inter-disciplinary structure has been proposed as an institute or center at the

University of Maryland. The proposal suggests that there be a relatively small coordinating structure of an interdisciplinary and multi-function nature which would function to assist in the coordination of the research, extension and teaching programs. There would then be a larger body of continuously involved faculty and staff in these programs. No one would be listed in such a central continuously involved staff who was not regularly involved in community development research or extension programs and/or teaching courses needed for training community development professionals. Staff involved only on a task or project basis in the programs would be attached temporarily to the center or institute and their major affiliation remain with the discipline department or agency of employment. The major objectives of such an institute or center include:

1. To provide a unit with responsibility for coordinating, planning and programming community development extension, research, and teaching programs.

2. To provide sufficient resources of personnel and programs to attract outside funding for the quantity and quality of programs required in the state.

3. To provide a unit for planning the long-range policy, staffing patterns, etc., to utilize the increased USDA funding for rural development research and extension.

4. To provide a unit which can provide a coherent and coordinated liaison with the other states and with the Regional Centers for Rural Development.

5. To provide a unit for developing cooperative and coordinated programming with federal, state, regional and local agencies in planning, staffing, funding and conducting community development research, extension, and teaching programs.

6. To provide a unit for planning and sponsoring training for graduate students, CRD Extension agents and other agency personnel working in community development research and extension.

We justify the proposal for such a management system on the fact that the problems of rural America cannot be solved by independent individual community, county or state efforts. A more systematic multi-unit coordinated approach is required. Rural social, cultural and economic systems which are capable of delivering the goods, services, and facilities essential in modern America must be constructed. Such an effort will require innovative approaches which build upon the many valid basic institutions of America and adapt other social and cultural traditions which in some respects are obsolete in today's technologically sophisticated and urbane society.

The land-grant system of research, extension and teaching applied to the development of American agriculture has given us a food and fibre industry unmatched anywhere in the world for quantity, quality and price. A similarly well organized and coordinated long-term research, extension, and teaching program is an approach, perhaps the only approach, which can make the greatest short-term contribution and also be capable of sustaining the continuous massive thrust that is required for the development and reconstruction of rural America.